



TEST FLIGHT

121



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DANGER—
EVERYWHERE!
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8 Terrific Issues Every Month

ON A DECEPTIVELY QUIET MORNING IN THE AUGUST OF 1941, A FORCE OF BLENHEIM BOMBERS SET OUT TO BOMB RAILWAY YARDS IN NAZI-DOMINATED FRANCE. SUCH ATTACKS HAD BEEN STEADILY MOUNTING OVER THE PAST WEEKS, CAUSING A TEASING DISRUPTION TO THE ENEMY'S RAILWAY MOVEMENTS.

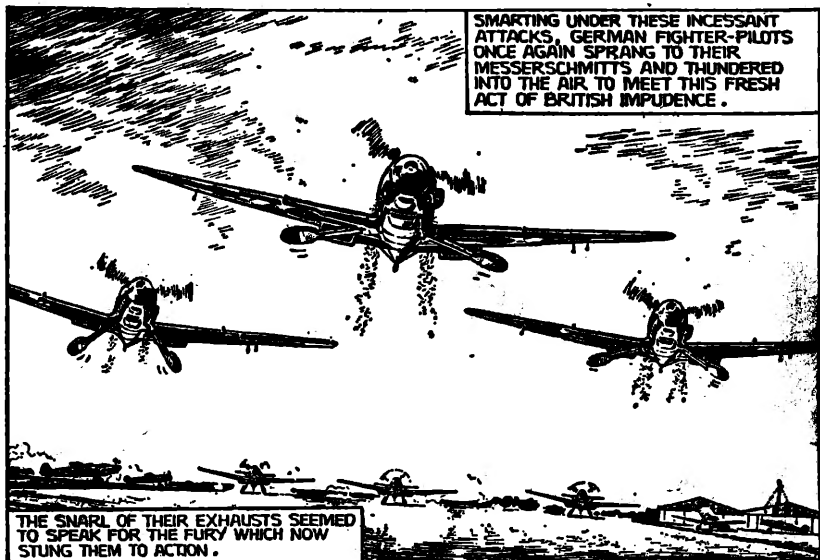
THE ROLE OF CLOSE ESCORT TO THIS TYPICALLY AUDACIOUS RAID WAS ENTRUSTED TO THE CRACK 501 SPITFIRE SQUADRON BASED AT COLTSWELL AERODROME IN KENT.

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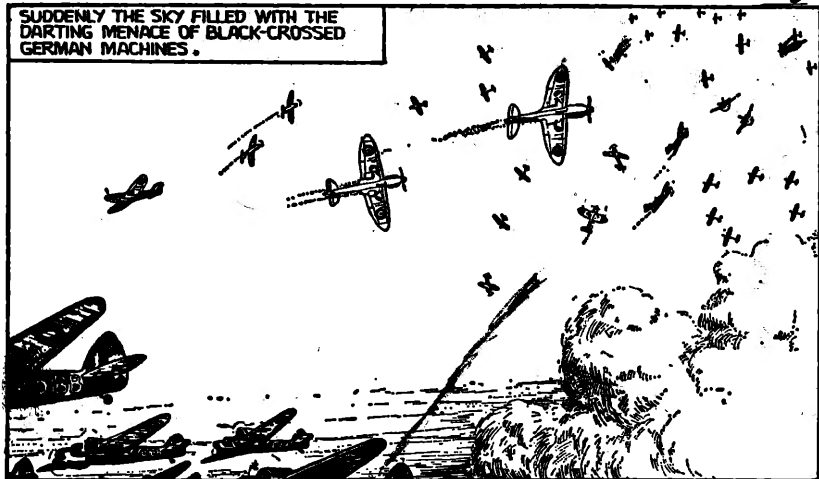
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PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 1960.

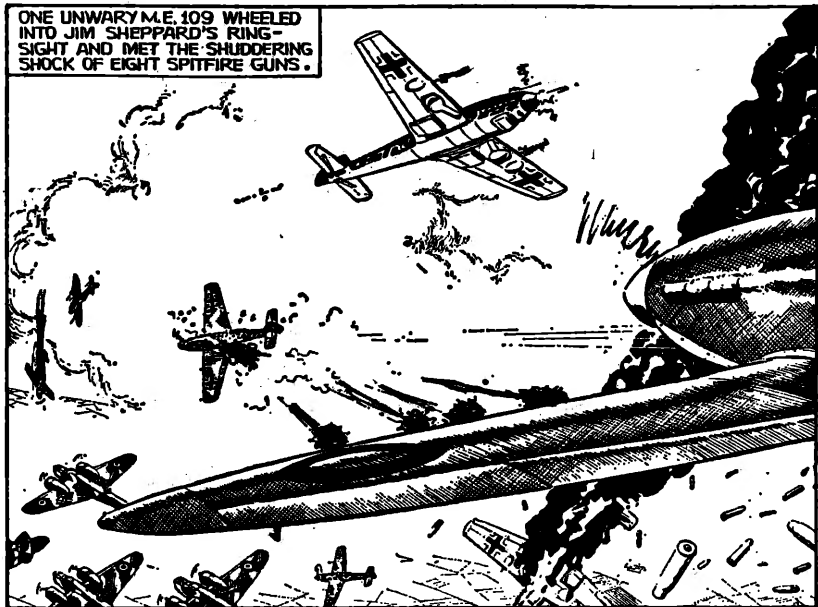
Chapter 1 WORD OF COMMAND



SUDDENLY THE SKY FILLED WITH THE DARTING MENACE OF BLACK-CROSSED GERMAN MACHINES.



ONE UNWARY M.E. 109 WHEELED INTO JIM SHEPPARD'S RING-SIGHT AND MET THE SHUDDERING SHOCK OF EIGHT SPITFIRE GUNS.



BUT NO RAGING AIR BATTLE COULD DEFLECT SQUADRON LEADER FRANK COREY FROM HIS PRIMARY DUTY—TO KEEP WITH THE BOMBERS.

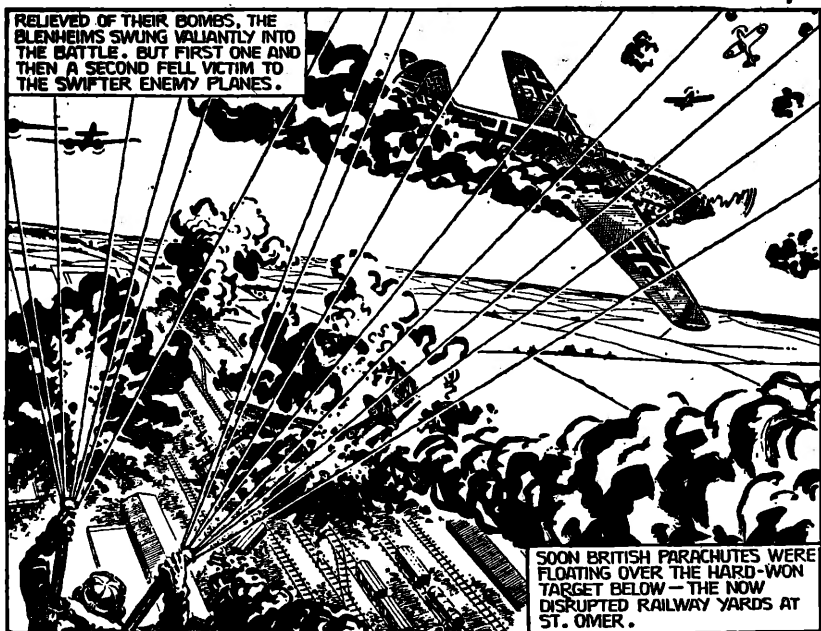
OKAY, STARFISH LEADER, SOME OF US ARE STILL WITH YOU!

THANKS, TARGET DEAD AHEAD.

THE BLENHEIMS PRESSED ON TO THEIR TARGET WITH COOL PRECISION. THEN AS THE MARSHALLING YARDS LIFTED WITH THE BLAST OF THEIR BOMBS SO THE AIR CONFLICT ROSE TO A CRESCENDO OF SOUND AND FURY.

THIS WAS THE HEAVIEST ENEMY REACTION THE BRITISH PLANES HAD MET FOR MANY WEEKS.

RELIEVED OF THEIR BOMBS, THE BLENHEIMS SWUNG VALIANTLY INTO THE BATTLE. BUT FIRST ONE AND THEN A SECOND FELL VICTIM TO THE SWIFTER ENEMY PLANES.



SOON BRITISH PARACHUTES WERE FLOATING OVER THE HARD-WON TARGET BELOW — THE NOW DISRUPTED RAILWAY YARDS AT ST. OMER.



BUT NOW, THE NIMBLE SPITFIRES WERE DEALING OUT VENGEANCE. TOO LATE THE NAZI PILOTS REALISED THEY WERE CROSSING SWORDS WITH A TOUGH AND MERCILESS FIGHTING MACHINE — 501 SPITFIRE SQUADRON.

SUDDENLY THE SKY BEGAN EMPTYING OF ENEMY PLANES. THE REMAINING ELENHEIMS LIMPED OFF HOME WHILE TEN BULLET-RIDDLED SPITFIRES COVERED THEIR WELL-EARNED WITHDRAWAL.

ARE YOU OKAY, STARFISH LEADER?

OKAY—THANKS TO YOU BOYS.

IT HAD BEEN A TOUGH ASSIGNMENT FOR ALL. TWO ELENHEIMS LOST AND TWO SPITFIRES. BUT THE TARGET HAD BEEN DEMOLISHED AND FIVE M.E. 109's DESTROYED.

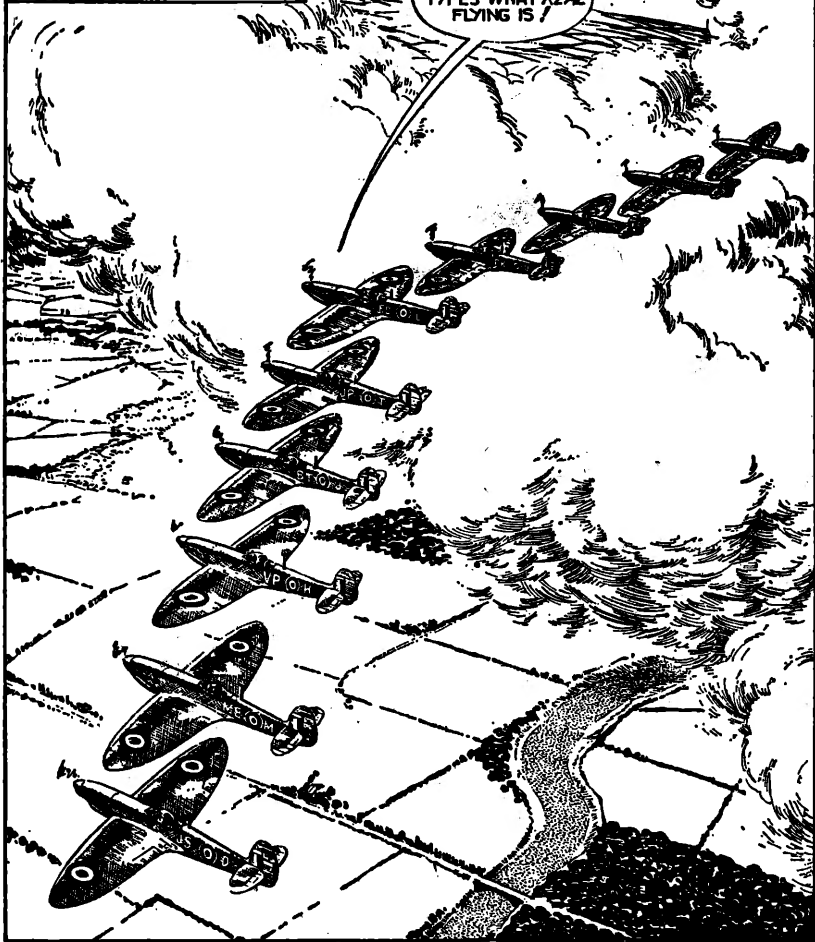
SOON THE ENGLISH COAST WAS REACHED. WITH THEIR TRICKY JOB NOW DONE, THE SPITFIRES TURNED FOR HOME. BUT THE GLAD RELIEF OF THE BATTLE-WEARY PILOTS TURNED TO GROANS AT THE SOUND OF SQUADRON LEADER CORBY'S NEXT WORDS...

NICE WORK, CHAPS... BUT CLOSE UP, LET'S GO HOME IN STYLE!

ONLY TOO WELL THE PILOTS KNEW WHAT GOING HOME IN STYLE MEANT!

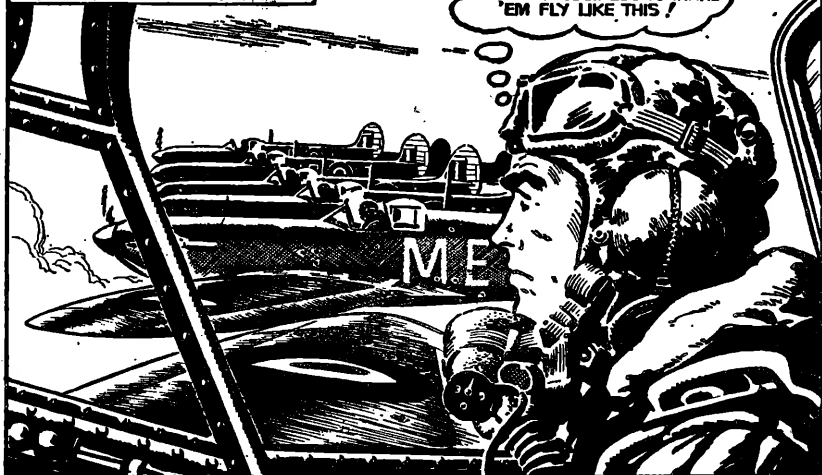
IT MEANT FORMATING IN A TIGHT ARROW ON THEIR LEADER - SO TIGHT AS TO ALLOW FOR NO MARGIN OF ERROR. IT WAS A STRAIN ON ANY PILOT, NO MATTER HOW TOUGH. BUT TO FRANK CORBY IT MEANT DISCIPLINE ... AND TO HIM, DISCIPLINE WAS A CREED.

WE'LL SHOW THESE OTHER TYPES WHAT *REAL* FLYING IS!



JIM SHEPPARD'S SYMPATHIES, AS ALWAYS, WERE WITH THE BOYS... A FELLOW-FEELING WHICH NO DOUBT EXPLAINED HIS POPULARITY.

THE CHAPS ARE DOG-TIRED. CORBY HAS NO BUSINESS TO MAKE 'EM FLY LIKE THIS!



BUT WHEN THEY LANDED, NOTHING THAT JIM COULD SAY WOULD SHIFT CORBY'S INFLEXIBLE WILL. IN STONY SILENCE THEY TRUGGED TO THE MESS UNAWARE OF THE OPINIONS RAISED BEHIND THEM...

I WISH JIM SHEPPARD WAS OUR SKIPPER.

CORBY NEVER LETS UP.



NOT THE WAY OLD JIM DOES.

JIM SHEPPARD HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO BE LIKED AND NOTHING MADE HIM HAPPIER THAN TO BE MIXING IN WITH THE BOYS.

...YOU'LL GET NO PROMOTION, THIS SIDE OF THE OCEAN...



ONE MAN HOWEVER SEEMED TO HOLD ALOOF FROM THIS JOLLITY. HE WAS 'B' FLIGHT'S COMMANDER, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT BRISCOE. NOW, AS ALWAYS, HE ENVIED JIM SHEPPARD HIS FUN AND QUICK WITS. HE HAD BEEN LIKE THAT HIMSELF, ONCE.

...SO CHEER UP, MY LADS, BLESS 'EM ALL!



NO-ONE HAD FATHOMED ALAN BRISCOE'S SECRET. CERTAINLY NO-ONE HAD GUESSED THAT HE WAS A MAN HAUNTED BY A DREAD VISION...

IT HAD HAPPENED AT TRAINING SCHOOL... A MID-AIR COLLISION... A WHITLEY HAD APPEARED FROM NOWHERE... THERE HAD BEEN NO TIME... HE HAD RAMMED IT...



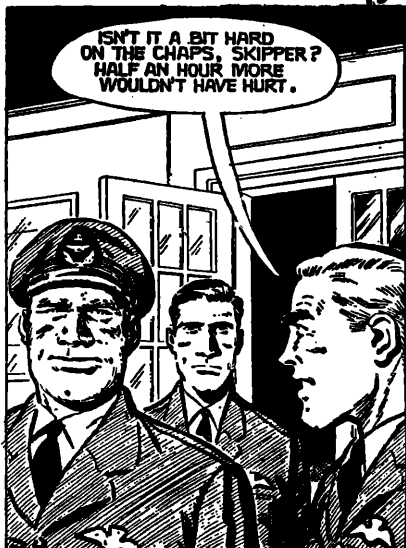
AND EVER SINCE, HE COULD HEAR THE CRIES OF TRAPPED MEN... THE GRINDING OF TORTURED METAL... IT WAS A MIRACLE HE LIVED... BUT THAT NIGHTMARE PICTURE HAD STUCK IN HIS MIND... IT HAD CHANGED HIM.

SUDDENLY FRANK CORBY STRODE IN. HIS GRIN WAS SYMPATHETIC EVEN IF HIS CLIPPED WORDS WERE NOT...

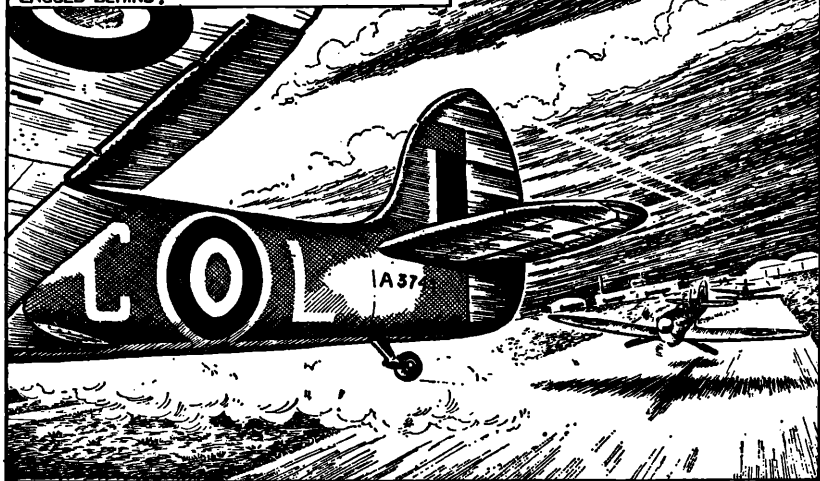


QUIET, CHAPS, PLEASE! A SIGNAL'S COME THROUGH FOR A JOB AT FIRST LIGHT...

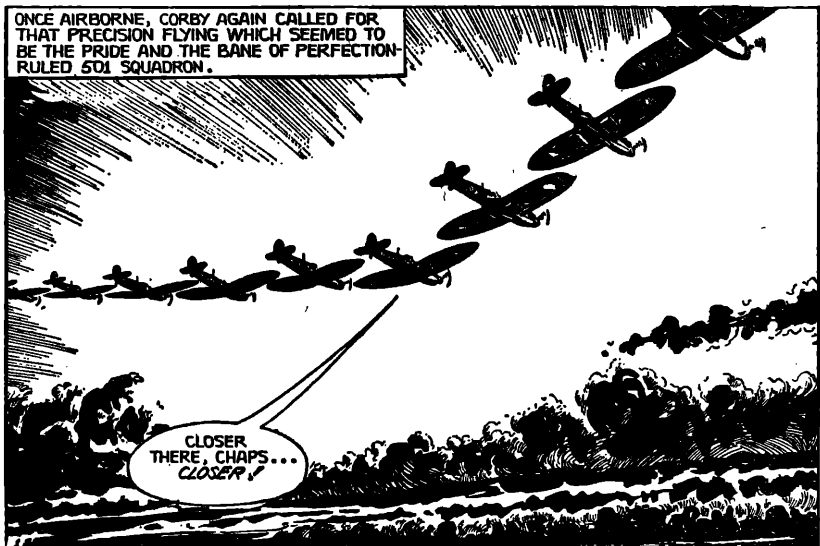




SHARP AT FIRST LIGHT, FRANK CORBY'S SPITFIRE WAS THUNDERING OFF THE RUNWAY WITH THE REST IN PURSUIT, AND WOE BETIDE THE MAN WHO LAGGED BEHIND!



ONCE AIRBORNE, CORBY AGAIN CALLED FOR THAT PRECISION FLYING WHICH SEEMED TO BE THE PRIDE AND THE BANE OF PERFECTION- RULED 601 SQUADRON.



ARRIVING OVER THE SEARCH AREA, THE SQUADRON GOT ITS ORDERS IN CORBY'S TYPICALLY CRISP STYLE. THEN CAME JIM'S TURN...

BLUE SECTION
LEADER...GET SEARCHING
THROUGH ZERO TO ONE-
EIGHTY...AND KEEP
YOUR EYES PEELED.

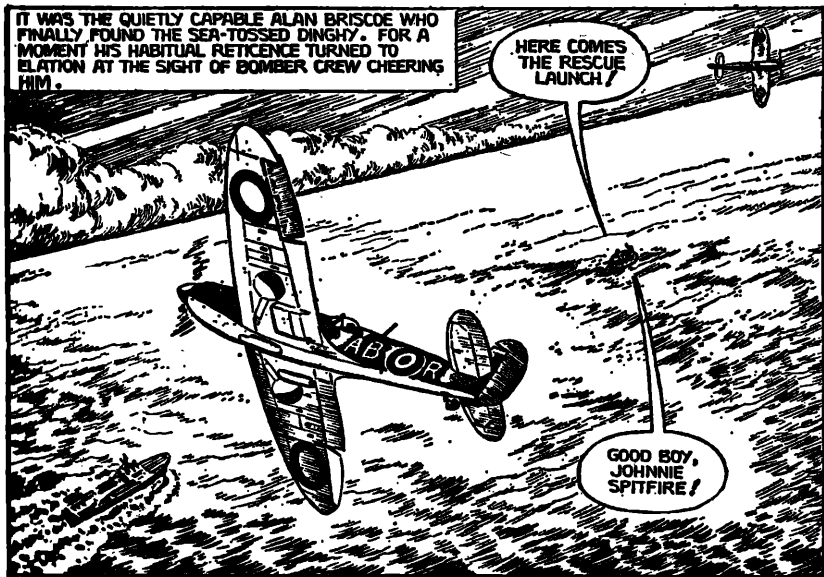
BLUE SECTION
HERE...
ROGER!

AS JIM'S SECTION PEELLED OFF, HE NOTICED AN AIR-SEA RESCUE LAUNCH COMING THE SEA BELOW FOR THE MISSING BOMBER CREW.

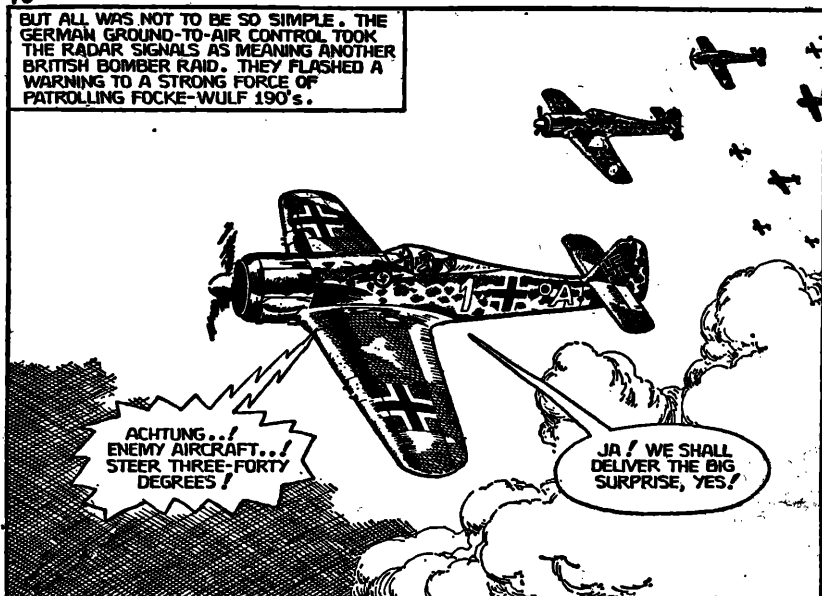
IT WAS THE QUIETLY CAPABLE ALAN BRISCOE WHO FINALLY FOUND THE SEA-TOSSED DINGHY. FOR A MOMENT HIS HABITUAL RETICENCE TURNED TO ELATION AT THE SIGHT OF BOMBER CREW CHEERING HIM.

HERE COMES
THE RESCUE
LAUNCH!

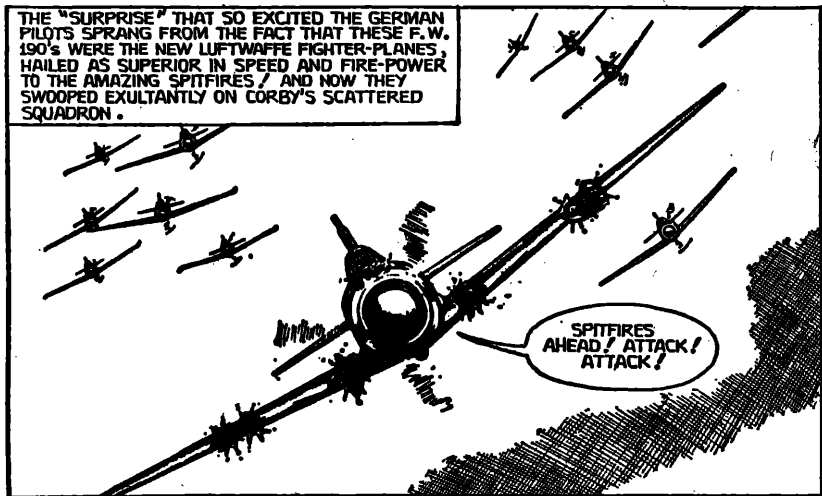
GOOD BOY,
JOHNNIE
SPITFIRE!



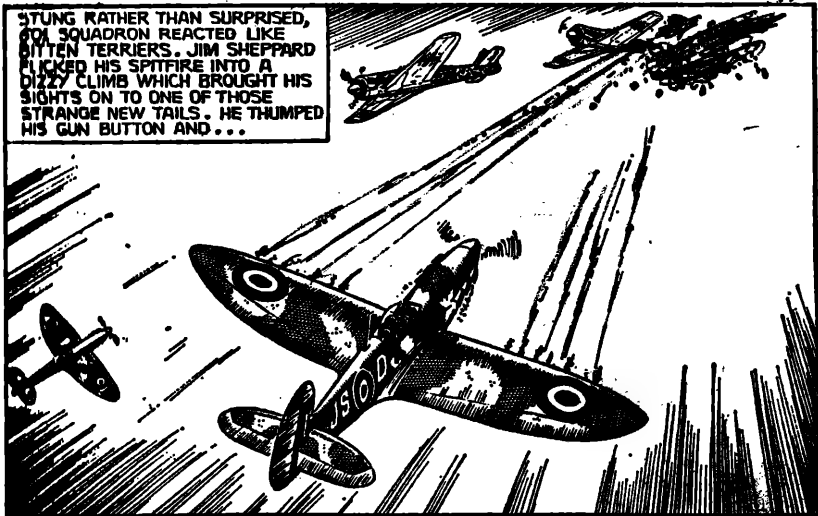
BUT ALL WAS NOT TO BE SO SIMPLE. THE GERMAN GROUND-TO-AIR CONTROL TOOK THE RADAR SIGNALS AS MEANING ANOTHER BRITISH BOMBER RAID. THEY FLASHED A WARNING TO A STRONG FORCE OF PATROLLING FOCKE-WULF 190's.



THE "SURPRISE" THAT SO EXCITED THE GERMAN PILOTS SPRANG FROM THE FACT THAT THESE F.W. 190's WERE THE NEW LUFTWAFFE FIGHTER-PLANES, HAILED AS SUPERIOR IN SPEED AND FIRE-POWER TO THE AMAZING SPITFIRES! AND NOW THEY SWOOPED EXULTANTLY ON CORBY'S SCATTERED SQUADRON.



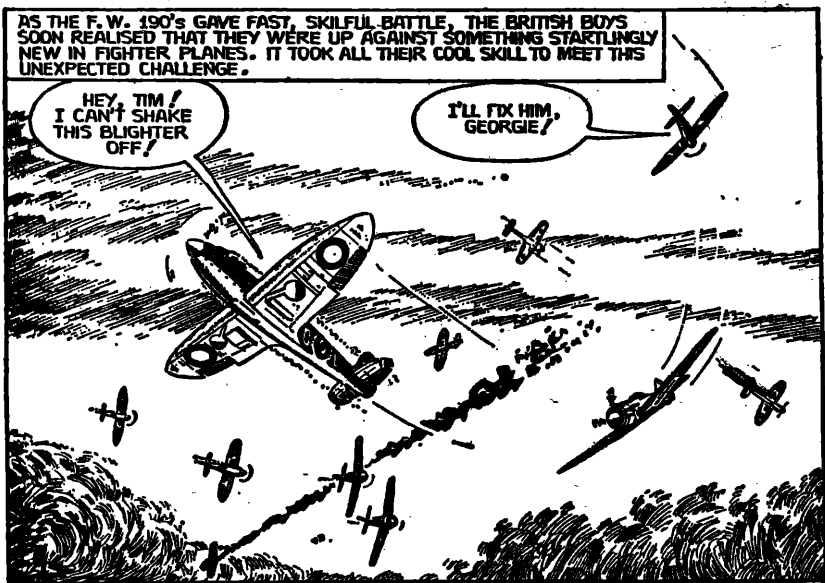
STUNG RATHER THAN SURPRISED, COL SQUADRON REACTED LIKE BITTEN TERRIERS. JIM SHEPPARD CLICKED HIS SPITFIRE INTO A DIZZY CLIMB WHICH BROUGHT HIS SIGHTS ON TO ONE OF THOSE STRANGE NEW TAILS. HE THUMPED HIS GUN BUTTON AND...



AS THE F.W. 190'S GAVE FAST, SKILFUL BATTLE, THE BRITISH BOYS SOON REALISED THAT THEY WERE UP AGAINST SOMETHING STARTLINGLY NEW IN FIGHTER PLANES. IT TOOK ALL THEIR COOL SKILL TO MEET THIS UNEXPECTED CHALLENGE.

HEY, TIM!
I CAN'T SHAKE
THIS BLIGHTER
OFF!

I'LL FIX HIM,
GEORGIE!



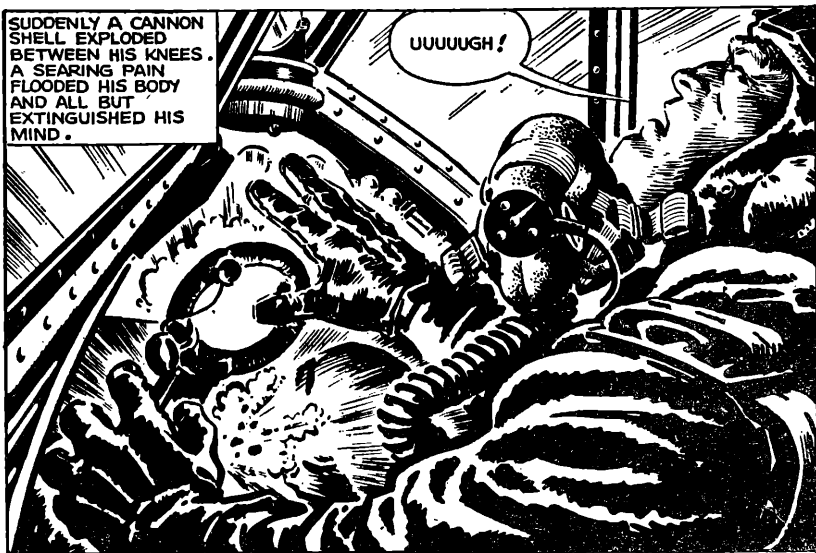
IF FRANK CORBY WAS NO GREAT MIXER IN THE MESS, HE CERTAINLY WAS WILLING TO MIX WHEN IT CAME TO AIR COMBAT!

MY HAT... THESE NEW JERRY KITES CAN MOVE!



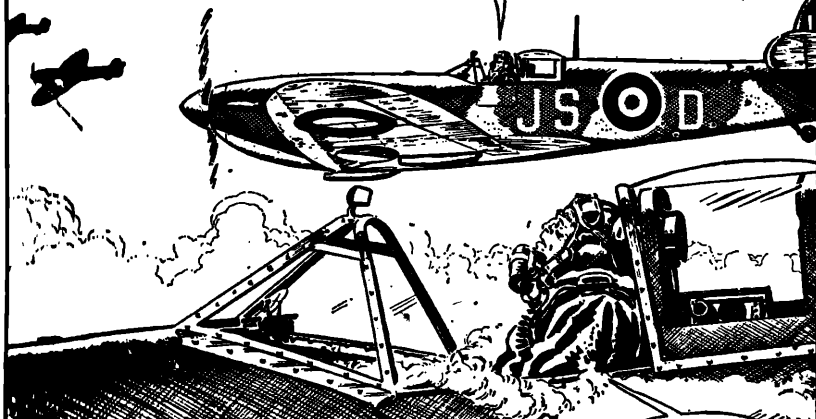
SUDDENLY A CANNON SHELL EXPLODED BETWEEN HIS KNEES. A SEARING PAIN FLOODED HIS BODY AND ALL BUT EXTINGUISHED HIS MIND.

UUUUUGH!



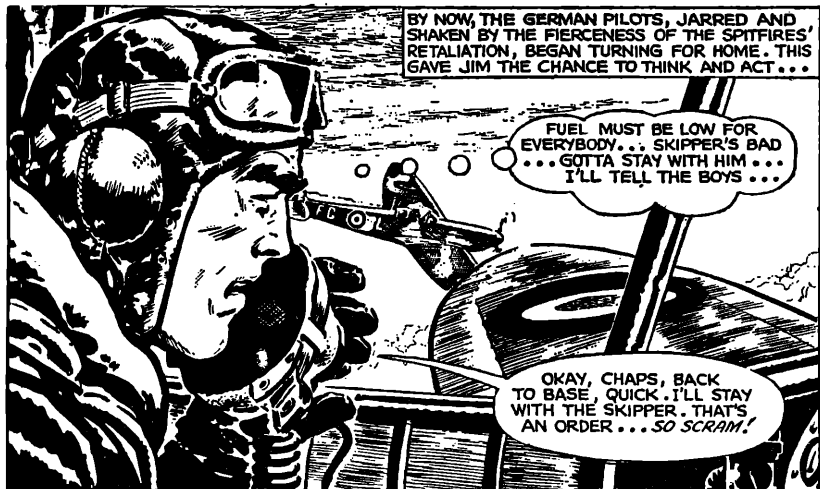
HIGH AND PAINT, FRANK CORBY FOUGHT OFF THE RED FILM THAT CLOAKED HIS VISION. HE COULD JUST GASP A REPLY TO JIM'S ANXIOUS QUERY.

IS IT BAD, SKIPPER?



FROM THE SWIMMING PIT OF CONSCIOUSNESS THERE FLOATED THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HIS PLANE WAS STILL FLYING, AND THAT HE, FRANK CORBY, WAS STILL FLYING IT. BUT FOR HOW LONG...?

MY...MY LEGS. MIGHT...JUST MANAGE.



BY NOW, THE GERMAN PILOTS, JARRED AND SHAKEN BY THE FIERCENESS OF THE SPITFIRES' RETALIATION, BEGAN TURNING FOR HOME. THIS GAVE JIM THE CHANCE TO THINK AND ACT...

FUEL MUST BE LOW FOR EVERYBODY... SKIPPER'S BAD... GOTTA STAY WITH HIM... I'LL TELL THE BOYS...

OKAY, CHAPS, BACK TO BASE, QUICK. I'LL STAY WITH THE SKIPPER. THAT'S AN ORDER... SO SCRAM!

RELUCTANTLY THE SQUADRON OBEYED. AND JIM, CHANCING HIS OWN SCANTY RESERVE OF FUEL, NOW BEGAN COAXING THE FALTERING FRANK CORBY TO THE NEAREST SHORE BASE.

YOU'RE DOING FINE, FRANK... BUT MUST KEEP HEIGHT...

... MUST KEEP HEIGHT... DON'T WORRY... WE'RE MAKING FOR MANSTON...

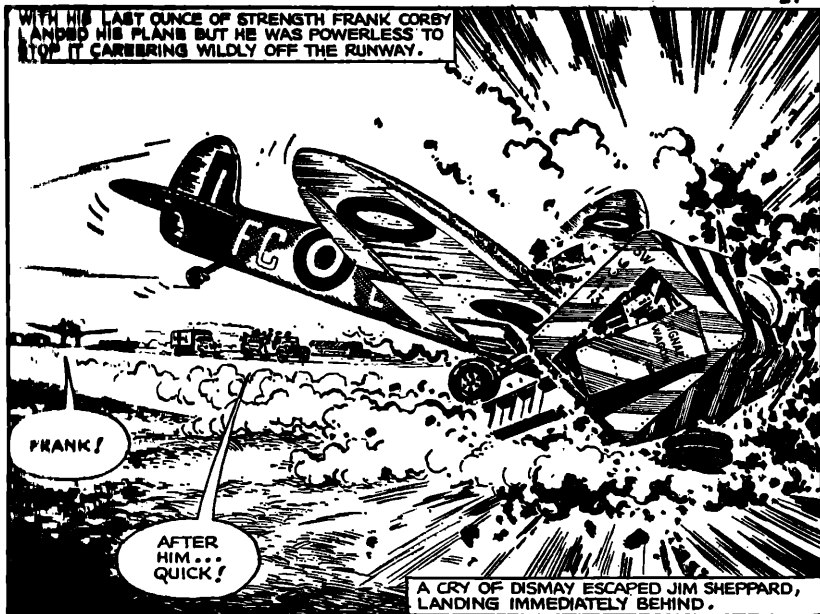
THE SLOW MINUTES BROUGHT JIM AN ANGUISHED FIGHT TO KEEP HIS SKIPPER CONSCIOUS. EVEN MORE INSISTENTLY CAME HIS URGING TONES BUT FRANK CORBY SEEMED, LIKE HIS GALLANT PLANE, TO BE SINKING EVER LOWER... THEN SUDDENLY...

THERE'S MANSTON, FRANK! YOU'VE MADE IT!

THERE THEY ARE!
... FIRE TENDER!
... AMBULANCE!

JIM'S COAXING OVER THE R/T HAD BEEN FOLLOWED WITH BATED BREATH BY MANSTON'S CONTROL TOWER. NOW CAME THE SUPREME MOMENT.

WITH HIS LAST OUNCE OF STRENGTH FRANK CORBY LANDED HIS PLANE BUT HE WAS POWERLESS TO STOP IT CARRERING WILDLY OFF THE RUNWAY.



JIM SKIDDED HIS PLANE TO A STANDSTILL AND RACED OVER TO THE WRECKAGE OF CORBY'S PLANE. HE FELT A FLOOD OF RELIEF AT THE DOCTOR'S WORDS...



Chapter 2. THE NEW SKIPPER

BY THE SHEER WILL TO LIVE, FRANK CORBY SURVIVED HIS INJURIES BUT HAD TO FACE A LONG TERM IN HOSPITAL. MEANWHILE IT TOOK 501 SQUADRON SOME TIME TO REALISE THAT THEY WERE NO LONGER WORKING UNDER THEIR SKIPPER'S CRITICAL EYE. MANY HOPED THAT JIM SHEPPARD WOULD FILL THE VACANCY. BUT EVEN JIM COULDN'T BELIEVE HIS GOOD LUCK WHEN ONE DAY HE WAS SUMMONED TO GROUP TO FACE THE AIR OFFICER COMMANDING.



AFTER A FEW MORE WORDS THERE CAME THE EXPECTED CAUTIONARY NOTE...





TO JIM'S RELIEF, HE AND THE AUSSIE BERT LUMLEY GOT ON LIKE A PAIR OF BROTHERS. NIGHTLY THE MESS RANG WITH SING-SONG...

THERE'S AN OLD MILL BY THE STREAM...
NELLIE DEAN...



ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOW THEIR COMMANDER, JIM FELT HE SHOULD STILL MIX IN WITH THE BOYS - NOT TAKE HIMSELF OFF, THE WAY FRANK CORBY USED TO. WITH HIM IT WOULD BE DIFFERENT.

COOLING OFF OUTSIDE, JIM ENTHUSED ON THESE POINTS WITH HIS STATION COMMANDER...

...I FEEL THAT IF YOU CAN WIN THE...ER... AFFECTION OF YOUR MEN, THEY WILL DO ANYTHING FOR YOU.

JIM, IT TAKES A CLEVER MAN TO BE BOTH MATE AND MASTER AT THE SAME TIME.

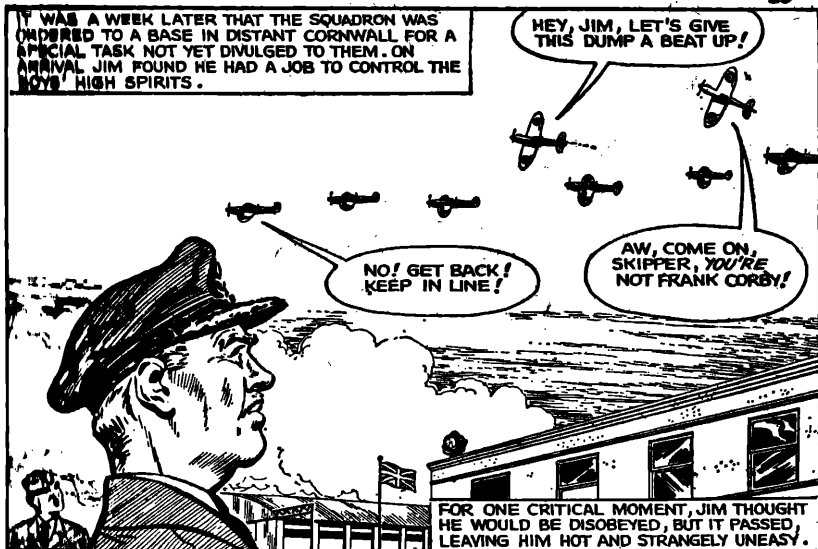


AT THE SENIOR MAN'S NEXT WORDS, JIM LOOKED UP SHARPLY...

THERE'S AN OLD SAYING JIM - POPULARITY IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR RESPECT!



IT WAS A WEEK LATER THAT THE SQUADRON WAS ORDERED TO A BASE IN DISTANT CORNWALL FOR A SPECIAL TASK NOT YET DIVULGED TO THEM. ON ARRIVAL JIM FOUND HE HAD A JOB TO CONTROL THE BOYS' HIGH SPIRITS.



FOR ONE CRITICAL MOMENT, JIM THOUGHT HE WOULD BE DISOBEYED, BUT IT PASSED, LEAVING HIM HOT AND STRANGELY UNEASY.

THEY LANDED WITHOUT INCIDENT, AND AFTER A MEAL THEY WERE WHIPPED BY THE STATION COMMANDER HIMSELF. CLEARLY THIS WAS AN OPERATION OF UNUSUAL IMPORTANCE. NOW THEY WERE TO LEARN...



THE CLIPPED WORDS WENT ON . . .

YOU SHOULD MEET THE YORK AT A POINT FIFTEEN MILES OFF BREST, HERE, AT TEN THOUSAND FEET. YOU WILL TAKE OVER ESCORT FROM OTHER SPITFIRES WHICH WILL THEN LEAVE. DESTINATION, TIMES AND COURSES WILL BE GIVEN LATER. THERE WILL BE STRICT R/T SILENCE. EVERYTHING CLEAR?

A HUSH MET THE QUERY—SAVE FOR AN ASSENT FROM JIM. THIS WAS CERTAINLY SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

THE NEXT MORNING THREW OFF ITS SEPTEMBER MIST AND THE TAKE-OFF WAS ON TIME IF SOMEWHAT RAGGED. AWARE OF THIS AND STILL EDGY FROM THE NEWS THAT THREE SPITFIRES WERE NON-STARTERS—JIM SPOKE WITH UNUSUAL SHARPNESS...

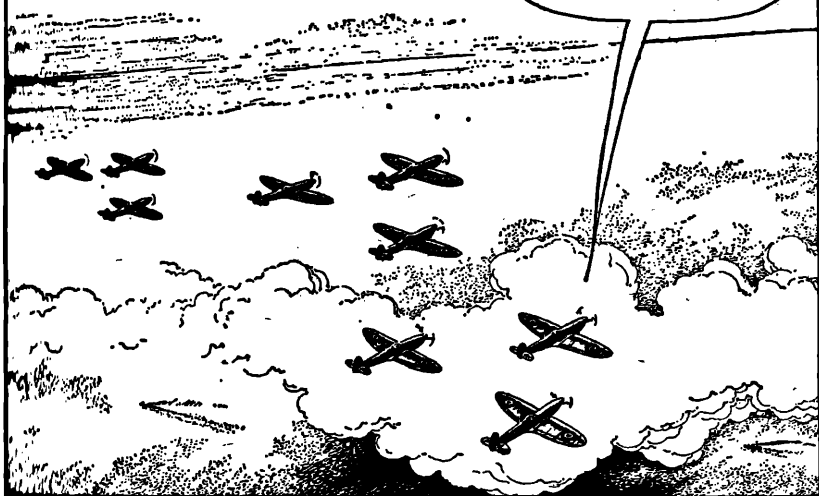
OLD JIM'S A BIT TOUCHY THIS MORNING.

CLOSE UP, THERE / STEP ON IT!

ONLY THE SILENTLY EFFICIENT ALAN BRISCOE WAS KEEPING UP WITH JIM'S PLANE.

FIVE MILES OUT FROM LAND'S END R/T
SILENCE SHOULD HAVE BEEN KEPT BUT THE
BREEZY BERT LUMLEY'S SPIRITS WERE TOO
MUCH FOR HIM. SUDDENLY A CRACKLE OF
WORDS BURST INTO JIM'S SCANDALISED EARS...

SAY, YOU SPORTS!
I BET I'M THE ONLY GUY
FROM WAGGA WAGGA WHO'S
SEEN LAND'S END!



STIFLING HIS ANGER, JIM
COAXED WHERE HE SHOULD
HAVE ORDERED—AND WELL
HE KNEW IT. AND YET...

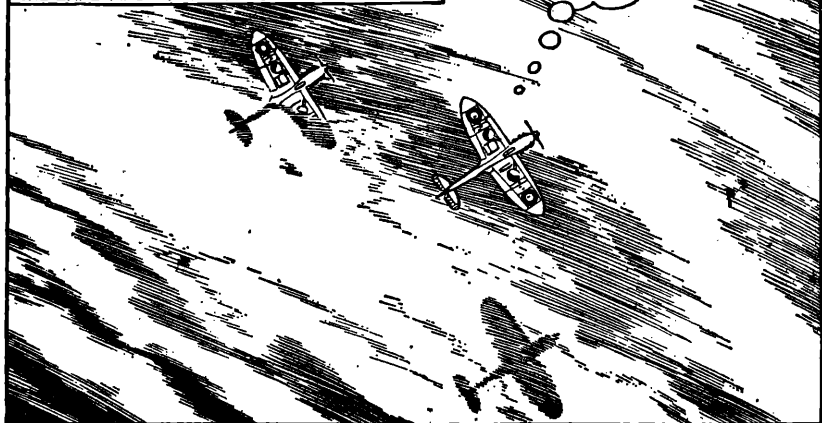
STOW
THE GAB, BERT,
OLD CHAP.

BERT'S SUCH
A DICKENT BLOKE
HE'S LIKE PULLING
RANK TO JUMP
ON HIM.

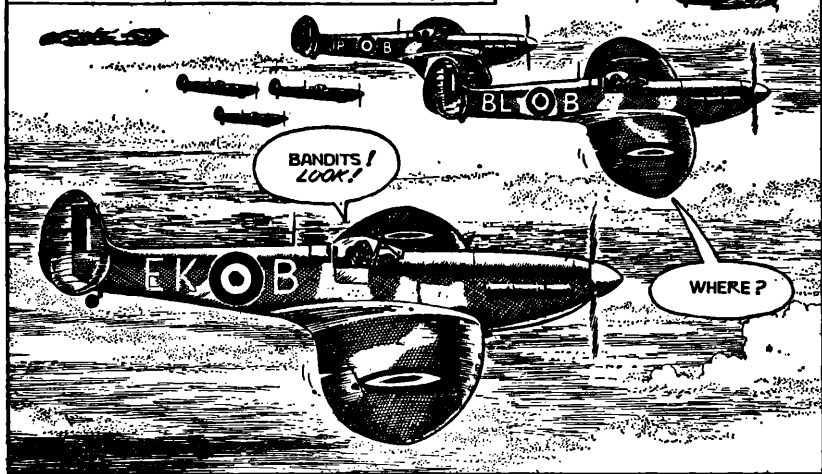


IN GRINNING SILENCE THE SQUADRON FOLLOWED JIM'S MACHINE TO TEN THOUSAND FEET WHERE THEY EXPECTED TO MEET THE YORK. BUT FLY HIGH OR LOW AT THAT ALTITUDE, JIM COULD NOT ESCAPE THE PATCHY MIST THAT ROSE FROM THE LAND MASS OF FRANCE.

IF THIS HAZE GETS WORSE, WE'LL HIT THE DARN THING!



NEARING THE MEETING POINT, JIM WAGGLED HIS WINGS TO INDICATE A KEEN LOOK-OUT BY EVERYBODY. SUDDENLY, AGAINST ALL ORDERS, THE INTER-COM EXPLODED INTO TALK. IT CAME FROM LUMLEY'S SECTION.



BANDITS!
LOOK!

WHERE?

JIM SHEPPARD SNATCHED A GLIMPSE
GLOW OF A COUPLE OF GLIM SHAPES
FLOODING THROUGH THE MIST.
ANGRILY HE SWITCHED ON HIS RADIO
TRANSMITTER.

JIM, LOOK!
DON'T YOU SEE?
(DOWN THERE!)

SHUT UP,
EVERYBODY! THEY'RE
SPITFIRES!

JIM COULD ALMOST FEEL THE MUTTERED
DISBELIEF AT HIS BACK.

THE NEXT MOMENT HE WAS
STARTLED BY ANOTHER YELL
FROM THE IRREPRESSIBLE
WILEY...

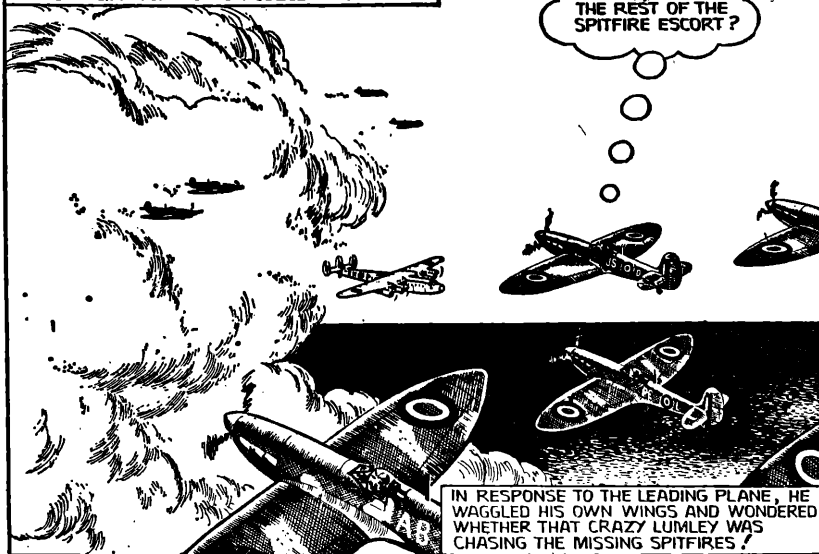
THEY'RE
HUNNING TO
ATTACK! WE'LL
BE BACK IN A
COUPLE OF
JIFFIES, JIM!

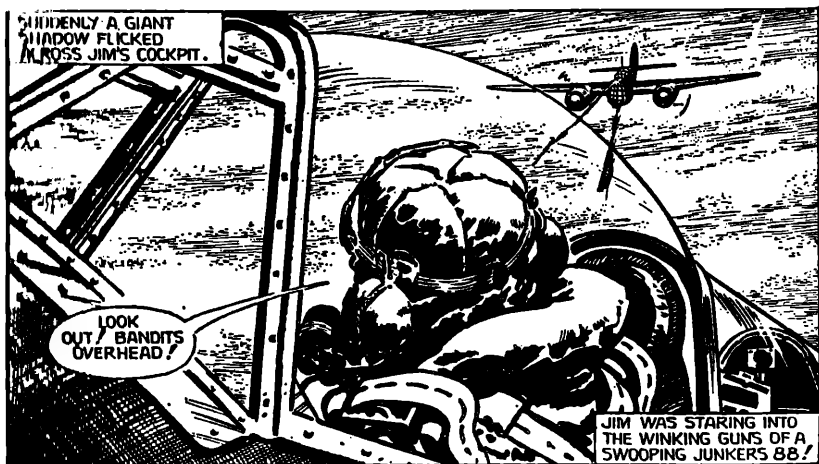
COME BACK,
YOU CRAZY
FOOL!

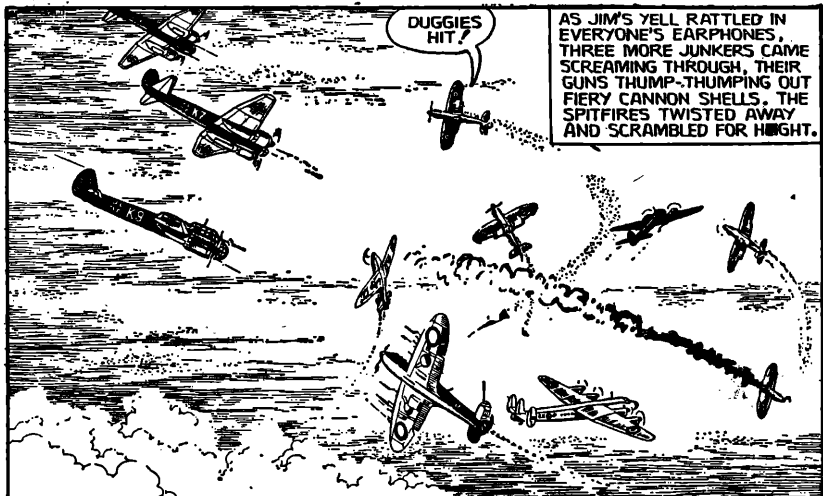
VAINLY JIM CALLED BUT THE
HEADSTRONG AUSTRALIAN WAS
ON HIS WAY, TAKING HIS SECTION
WITH HIM.



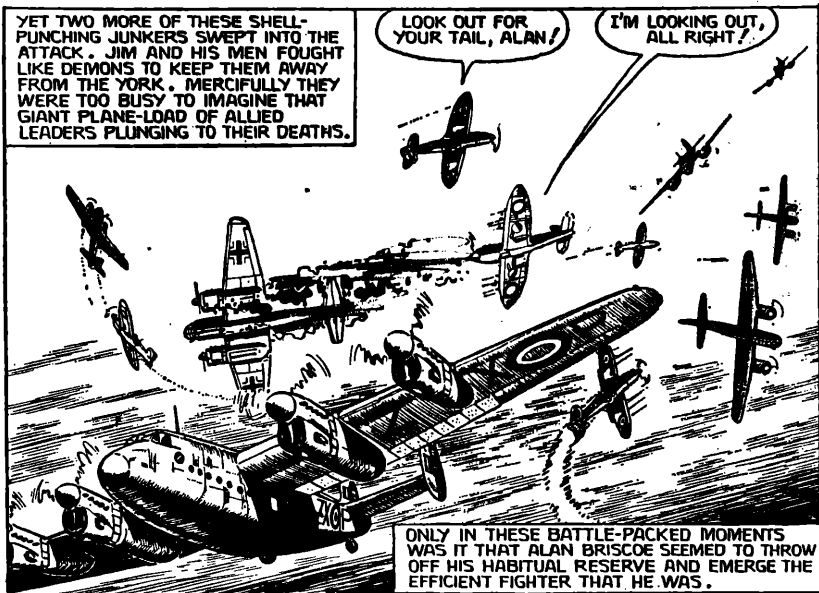
SUDDENLY, THERE WAS THE YORK ITSELF... AND WITH IT ONLY FOUR ESCORTING SPITFIRES. JIM'S RELIEF TURNED TO PUZZLEMENT.





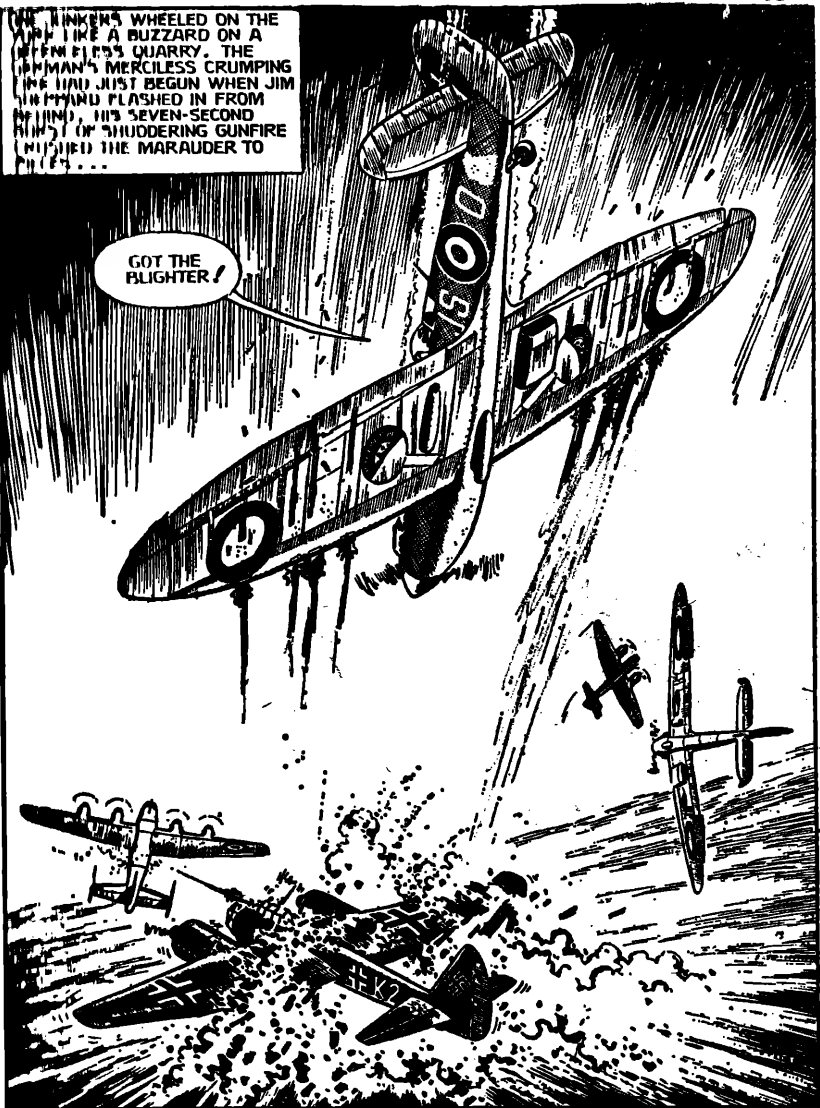


YET TWO MORE OF THESE SHELL-PUNCHING JUNKERS SWEEPED INTO THE ATTACK. JIM AND HIS MEN FOUGHT LIKE DEMONS TO KEEP THEM AWAY FROM THE YORK. MERCIFULLY THEY WERE TOO BUSY TO IMAGINE THAT GIANT PLANE-LOAD OF ALLIED LEADERS PLUNGING TO THEIR DEATHS.



THE BINKER WHEELED ON THE
WIND LIKE A BUZZARD ON A
WORMY QUARRY. THE
JAPANESE MERCILESS CRUMPLING
THE HIND JUST BEGUN WHEN JIM
THE HIND FLASHED IN FROM
BEHIND, HIS SEVEN-SECOND
HITS OF THUNDERING GUNFIRE
CRUSHED THE MARAUDER TO
PIECES....

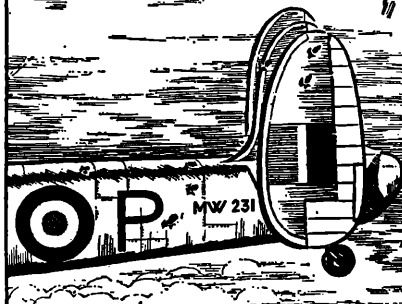
GOT THE
BLIGHTER!



THE YORK WAS HOLED BUT LUCKILY NO ONE INSIDE WAS HIT. JIM WIPED THE SWEAT OF SHEER RELIEF FROM HIS FACE AND GLANCED AROUND AS THE OTHER SPITFIRES DREW NEAR. ALAN BRISCOE WAS ONCE MORE AS LACONIC AS EVER.

WHERE'S THE ENEMY, ALAN?

GONE HOME!



JIM BROODED ON THEIR ONE LOST PILOT, FREDDIE STOKES. AND STILL THERE WAS NO SIGN OF LUMLEY AND HIS SECTION.

THE FIVE SPITFIRES SAFELY SAW THE YORK TO ITS DESTINATION AT NORTHOLT AERODROME. THEN JIM LED THEM TO THEIR HOME BASE, BY THIS TIME A VERY THOUGHTFUL MAN.

THERE'LL BE QUESTIONS ABOUT TODAY, JIM, MY BOY... AND I'LL HAVE A FEW QUESTIONS TO ASK, MYSELF!



GROUP CAPTAIN SHARP WAS THERE TO GREET THEM, BUT THE SMILE DRAINED FROM HIS FACE AS JIM WEARILY OUTLINED THE DAY.

HOW DO YOU MEAN... A SHAMBLE?

WELL, THERE WAS TOO MUCH QUACKING ON THE R.T... MAYBE THE GERMANS HEARD... WE WERE BOUNCED BY EIGHTY-EIGHTS... THEY NEARLY GOT THE YORK... WE KNOCKED TWO DOWN... BUT LOST FREDDIE STOKES.



JIM DID NOT MENTION ABOUT LUMLEY. HE WANTED TO DEAL WITH THE MAN HIMSELF, FIRST.

IT WAS ALMOST DUSK BEFORE BERT LUMLEY AND THE OTHER TWO MISSING PLANES TOUCHED DOWN AT COLTSWELL. CATCHING THEIR CASUAL LAUGHTER, JIM'S SORELY TRIED PATIENCE CRACKED.



LUMLEY'S HALF-INSOLENT FAMILIARITY MADE JIM REALLY ANGRY.



SUDDENLY THE SURPRISED AUSTRALIAN WAS ON HIS BACK WHILE THE FURIOUS JIM STOOD NURSING HIS BRUISED KNUCKLES.

STEADY, JIM.

FORGET IT...? FORGET FREDDIE STOKES...? FORGET THAT THE DARNED YORK NEARLY HAD IT? I'D LIKE TO KICK YOU OFF THE CAMP! IN FUTURE YOU DO AS YOU'RE TOLD!



ALL THIS GOT TO THE EARS OF THE STATION COMMANDER. AND THE NEXT DAY...

I'M SORRY THIS HAD TO HAPPEN, JIM. IT ISN'T A GOOD SIGN WHEN A COMMANDER HAS TO RESORT TO VIOLENCE. AND THERE'S ONE OTHER THING...

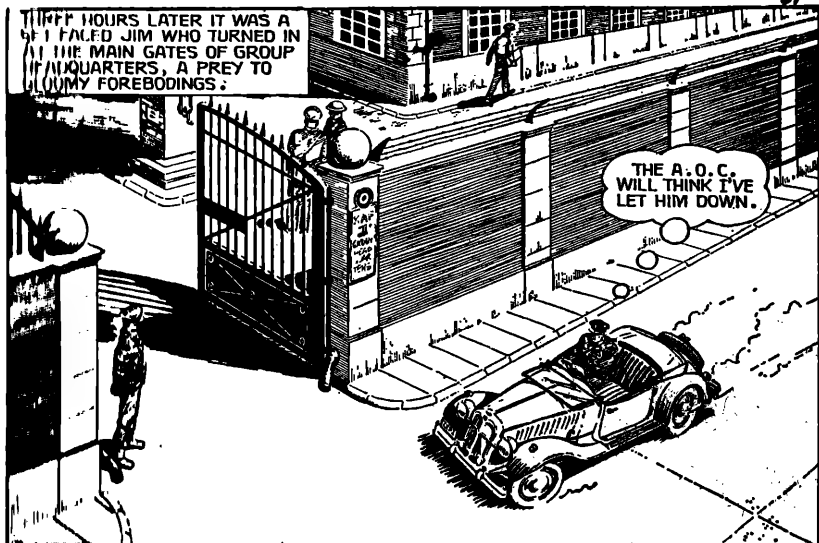


IT'S A SIGNAL FROM GROUP, JIM. THE A. O. C. WANTS TO SEE YOU. MAYBE YOU CAN IMAGINE WHY.

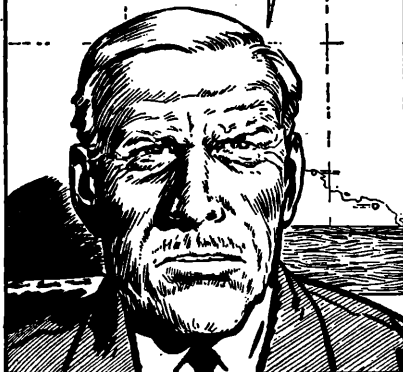
I... I SEE, SIR. I'D BETTER GO RIGHT AWAY.



JIM'S HEART SANK. IT COULD ONLY BE ABOUT THE ATTACK ON THE YORK.



YOU SHOULD HAVE MADE THINGS CLEARER TO *YOURSELF*, SQUADRON LEADER - THAT YOUR FIRST REQUIREMENT WAS *UNDISPUTED LEADERSHIP*!



WITH BURNING FACE, JIM STOOD AND TOOK THE MEASURED REPRIMANDING TONES UNTIL THERE CAME A MERCIFUL END TO THE WHOLE PAINFUL INTERVIEW...

THE POPULAR MAN IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST LEADER. YOU MUST CHOOSE THE RUGGED AND MORE LONELY PATH THAT LEADS TO RESPECT - FROM OTHERS. NOW GET BACK TO YOUR SQUADRON - *AND LEARN TO BE ITS BOSS!*



YES SIR!



FEELING LIKE CHEWED STRING, JIM THANKFULLY WITHDREW.

SOBERED BY HIS VISIT, JIM RETURNED TO THE MESS AT COLTSWELL BRACED FOR A NEW EFFORT AT AUTHORITY. THE SCENE THAT MET HIS ARRIVAL WAS NOT ENCOURAGING.

HIYA, JIM

SHORTY'S GOING TO DRIVE RIGHT IN TO DINNER!

FRANK CORBY WAS RIGHT - YOU CAN MIX IN TOO MUCH. YOU GET NO RESPECT.





STILL JIM PERSEVERED, TRYING TO IGNORE THE CHANGE THAT WAS COMING OVER THE PILOTS. WHERE HE THOUGHT HE WAS INJECTING AUTHORITY, HIS MEN GAVE IT ANOTHER NAME...

TEST MY KITE?
WHAT, NOW?

YOU
HEARD
ME!

JIM'S THROWING
HIS WEIGHT AROUND
AIN'T HE?

ALWAYS
FLAPPING ABOUT
SOMETHING!



GRADUALLY THERE BEGAN TO SPRING UP AN ATMOSPHERE OF MISTRUST, INJURED FEELINGS AND OPEN RESENTMENT.

THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS WERE CERTAINLY THE BLACKEST THAT JIM COULD REMEMBER...

...TROUBLE IS, THESE CHAPS LIKE ME BUT THEY DON'T RESPECT ME. MAYBE THEY DON'T EVEN LIKE ME EITHER, NOW.



ALL THIS TIME BERT LUMLEY HAD BEEN SIDE-STEPPING TROUBLE, BUT NOW HE OPENLY ASKED FOR IT.

I SAID, THIS BEATING UP THE AIRFIELD MUST STOP! WHO IS THAT?

IT'S FLIGHT LIEUTENANT LUMLEY, SIR.





IT WAS A HAVOC AIRCRAFT, A BLACK-PAINTED NIGHT-FIGHTER VERSION OF THE CELEBRATED DOUGLAS BOSTON. NOW IT SNARLED AROUND THE LANDING CIRCUIT, LOOKING EVERY INCH WHAT IT WAS — A KILLER BY NIGHT. YET THERE WAS SOMETHING UNUSUAL ABOUT IT...

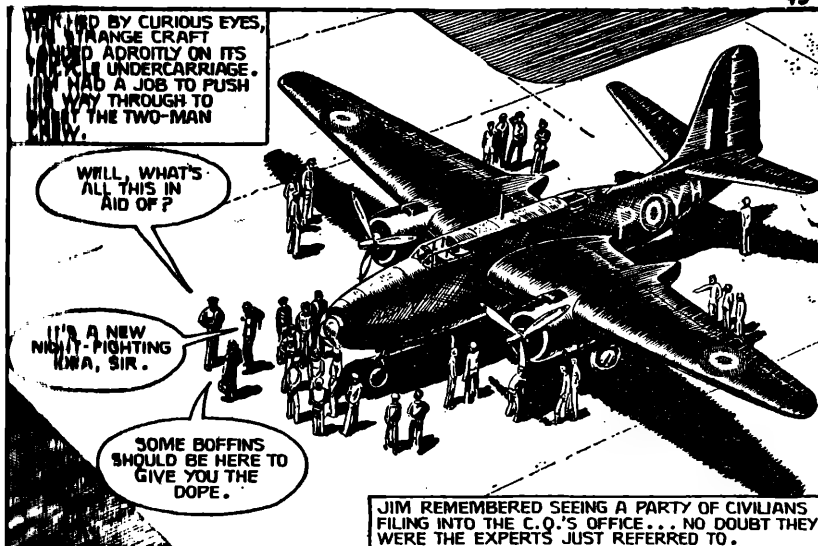


REQUEST
PERMISSION
TO LAND

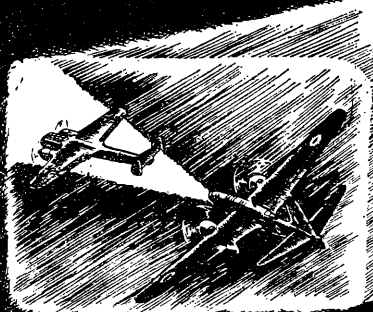
WHAT THE
DICKENS?

REQUEST
GRANTED. COME
IN, JOHNNIE HAVOC!

JIM WAS SECRETLY GLAD OF THIS
DIVERSION. HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT
HE MEANT TO DO WITH LUMLEY.



THE HAVOC'S JOB IS TO PICK-UP AND INTERCEPT AND FORMATE ON THE ENEMY INTRUDER. HAVING DONE THAT IT WILL SWITCH ON ITS SEARCHLIGHT AND ILLUMINE THE TARGET PLANE. NOW...



SIR ARTHUR'S NEXT WORDS BROUGHT COMPLETE SILENCE... AND THEN MUTTERED ASTONISHMENT.

NOW COMES THE MOMENT! A SPECIALLY-TRAINED SPITFIRE, ACCOMPANYING THE HAVOC, WILL DART FORWARD AND ATTACK THE INTRUDER. THAT IS WHERE YOU BOYS COME IN.



FORMATE ON A HAVOC!

IN THE DARK!

GROUP CAPTAIN SHARP HAD JIM AND THE HAVOC CREW, WATSON AND MILLARD, INTO HIS OFFICE TO TALK THE THING OVER...



FOR THE MOMENT ONLY ONE SPITFIRE AND PILOT ARE NEEDED. IT'LL MEAN NIGHT-FLYING TRAINING... PRACTICE WITH THE HAVOC. QUESTION IS... WHO?

WELL, WHY NOT ME?



Chapter 3. HAZARD BY NIGHT

ALAN BRISCOE TOOK UP THE TRAINING RIGHT AWAY. FIRST HE HAD TO OVERCOME THE PITFALLS OF NIGHT-FLYING, THEN PRACTISE THE FORMATING ON THE HAVOC. BRISCOE FOUND THAT HIS IMAGINATION HAD NOT OVER-PLAYED THE PERILS OF CHASING A CAREERING, ALMOST INVISIBLE BLACK SHADOW THROUGH BAFFLING DARKNESS.

IT'S SO TRICKY TO KEEP... THE RIGHT DISTANCE.



HE OFTEN RETURNED FROM THESE FLIGHTS COMPLETELY SPENT AND SOAKED IN A COLD SWEAT.

COR, LUMME YOU LOOK FAIR WORE OUT, SIR!

I'M OKAY, FLIGHT,



NOT EVEN TO HIMSELF WOULD ALAN BRISCOE ADMIT THAT THIS NIGHTLY PRACTICE WAS SLOWLY SAPPING NOT ONLY HIS STAMINA BUT THE VERY INNERMOST RESERVES OF COURAGE, SO JEALOUSLY GUARDED THESE MANY MONTHS.

THE EVENING, JIM SHEPPARD HAD TO GET HIMSELF
 WITH THE OTHER PILOTS THROUGH THE EARLY STAGES
 OF NIGHT FLYING. THIS WAS IN PREPARATION FOR
 THE ARRIVAL OF MORE SPECIALLY-FITTED HAVOCS.

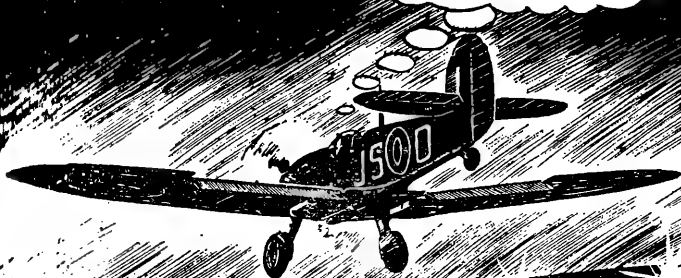
MAKE SURE
 OF YOUR ANGLE,
 TAFFY!

STOP BELLYACHING,
 JIM. I'M ALL RIGHT!

BEING AS INEXPERIENCED IN THIS NIGHT-
 FLYING AS THE MOST JUNIOR PILOT, JIM
 FELT THE AUTHORITY HE SO BADLY NEEDED
 AS FAR OFF AS EVER.

HE HAD DESPAIRED OF
 EVER REACHING THE STANDARD OF
 THE OTHER PILOTS HE AIMED FOR.

IF ONLY I COULD START ALL OVER
 AGAIN. ONCE YOU'VE LET
 THINGS SLIP...



EVEN THE NEW HAZARD OF NIGHT-
 LANDING COULD NOT WHOLLY DRIVE
 AWAY THE GLOOM THAT POSSESSED HIM.

CLIMBING DOWN FROM HIS COOLING SPITFIRE, JIM LOOKED UP INTO THE DARK HEAVENS, A THOUGHT FOR SOMEONE ELSE CROSSING HIS MIND...

I WONDER HOW
ALAN BRISCOE'S
MAKING OUT, UP
THERE ?



ONE LOOK AT BRISCOE'S STRAINED FACE WOULD HAVE GIVEN JIM A PARTIAL ANSWER. TRUE, THE TRAINEE WAS KEEPING PRETTY GOOD STATION ON THE HAVOC BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS A RISK!

ARE
YOU OKAY,
LITTLE
BROTHER ?



NO-ONE SAVE ALAN BRISCOE REALLY KNEW WHAT LAY BEHIND HIS STRAINED-LOOKING EYES, WIDE AND FEAR-FILLED. IT WAS AN OLD NIGHTMARE REARING ITS HIDEOUS REMINDER... THE NIGHTMARE OF COLLISION!

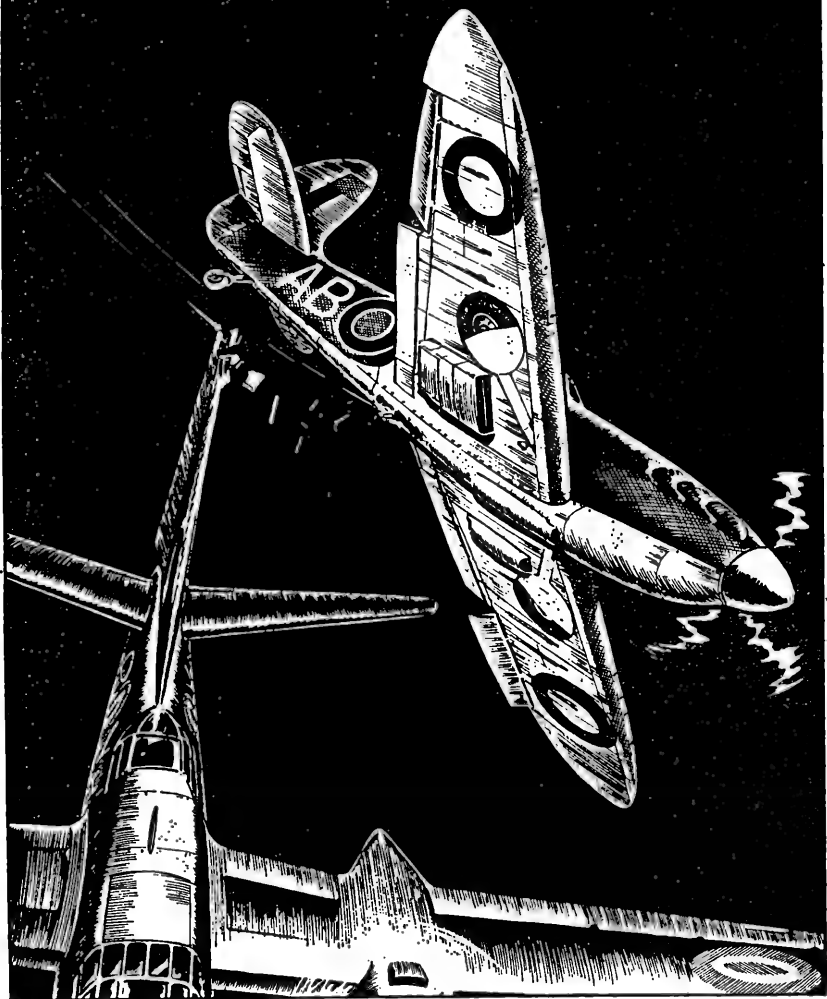


SUDDENLY THE HAVOC IN FRONT FLEW UP. THERE WAS NO TIME TO THINK WHY. SCREAMING A FURTHER WARNING, BRISCOE CLAMMED ON THE RUDDER BAR...

LOOK OUT!



WITH A SHUDDERING WRENCH THE SPITFIRE MISSED COLLISION BY A HAIRSBREADTH BUT IT JUST SNICKED THE HAVOC'S TAIL.



THE SPITFIRE FELL
EARTHWARD AND ALAN
BRISCOE WAS CAUGHT IN
A WHIRLPOOL OF FEAR
AND SPINNING NIGHT.
ONCE AGAIN HIS FRANTIC
MIND HEARD THAT
CRUNCHING, SEARING
HORROR OF TWO PLANES
LOCKED TOGETHER . . .
TWISTING . . . FALLING . . .



NOT IT WAS A COMPLETE BLINDNESS
WITHIN THE SPITFIRE NOW THE HAVES
WERE MORE THAT THOUGHT IT

IN THE NICK OF TIME, BRISCOE RETURNED. BRISCOE MANAGED
TO REGAIN CONTROL AND GUIDE HIS WAY BACK TO BASE. BUT
HE WAS A SICK MAN, HIS NERVE TORN TO TWITCHING THREADS
JIM WAS THE FIRST TO REACH HIM . . .

I'VE . . . I'VE
HAD IT, HIM.

WHAT'S
WRONG,
ALAN?



JIM GOT THE EXHAUSTED MAN TO SICK-
QUARTERS WHERE HE AND THE WORRIED
STATION COMMANDER LEARNED THE
TRUTH . . .

COMPLETE NERVOUS
EXHAUSTION. ABSOLUTE
REST ESSENTIAL.



AS THE FAMILIAR VOICE OF THE C.O. SOUNDED IN HIS EARS THE CHIEF CONTROL OFFICER BEGAN SPEAKING URGENTLY . . .



GROUP'S JUST BEEN THROUGH, SIR. THEY SUSPECT THAT THE HUN HAS GOT WIND OF CONVOY X20. IT'S ALMOST CERTAIN THEY'LL SEND OUT A PATHFINDER PLANE TO FIND IT.

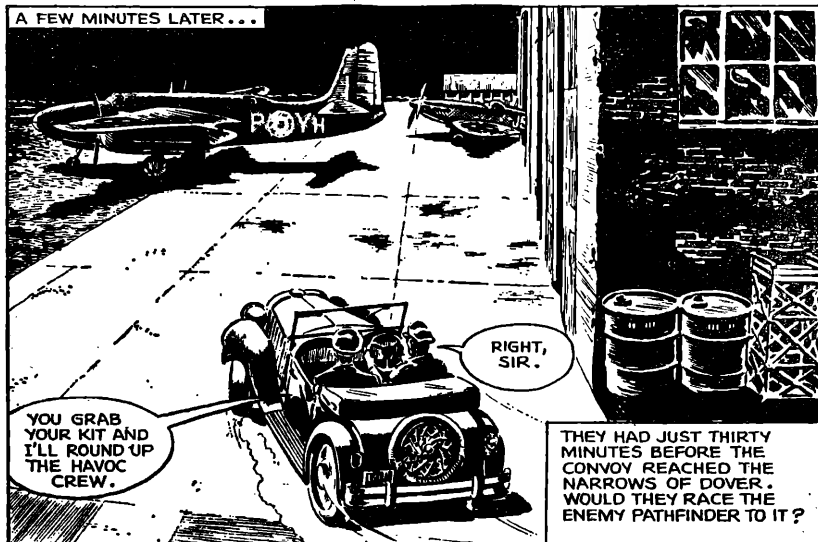
GROUP CAPTAIN SHARP LISTENED SOME MORE, THEN TURNED A STARTLED FACE TO THE WATCHING JIM . . .

MY STARS! GROUP WANT US TO SEND UP THE HAVOC AND SPITFIRE! CONVOY X20 . . . GOING THROUGH THE STRAITS OF DOVER AT MIDNIGHT . . . JAM-PACKED WITH WAR MATERIAL . . . THEY THINK A GERMAN PATHFINDER'S OUT AFTER IT . . .

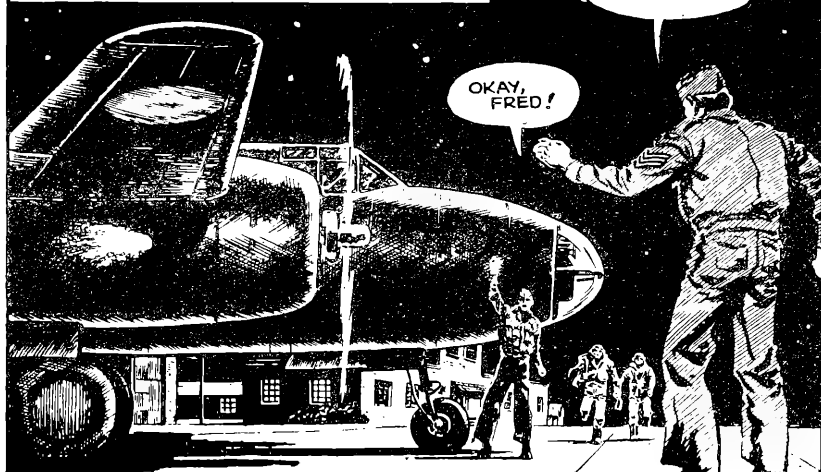


THAT MEANS A MATH BOMBING ATTACK!





GROUND CREW WERE SUMMONED... THE HASTY WARMING-UP BEGUN. THE HAVOC PAIR CAME POUNDING OVER THE TARMAC. OPERATIONS WERE WARNED. THE VERY AIR WAS FIRED WITH URGENCY!



DEAFENED BY HIS AIRSCREW, JIM FELT RATHER THAN HEARD HIS C.O.'S GOOD WISHES...

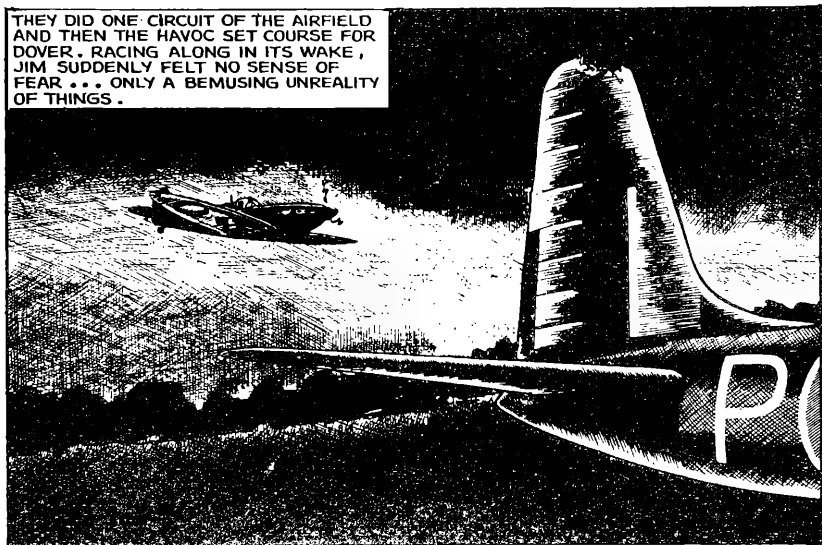


JIM GAVE THE HAVOC TIME TO
GET CLEAR AND THEN . . .

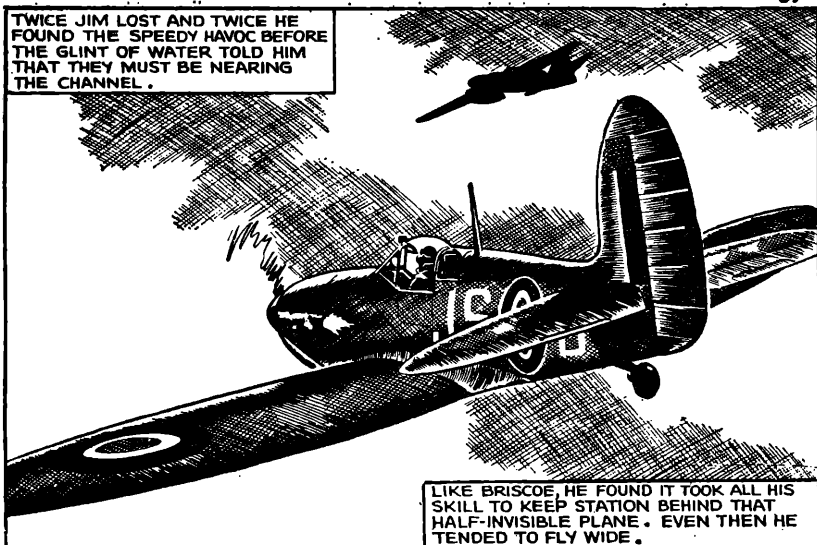
NIGHTJAR
AIRBORNE . .
NIGHTJAR
AIRBORNE . . .

WELL . . .
THIS IS IT!

THEY DID ONE CIRCUIT OF THE AIRFIELD
AND THEN THE HAVOC SET COURSE FOR
DOVER. RACING ALONG IN ITS WAKE,
JIM SUDDENLY FELT NO SENSE OF
FEAR . . . ONLY A BEMUSING UNREALITY
OF THINGS.



TWICE JIM LOST AND TWICE HE FOUND THE SPEEDY HAVOC BEFORE THE GLINT OF WATER TOLD HIM THAT THEY MUST BE NEARING THE CHANNEL.



LIKE BRISCOE, HE FOUND IT TOOK ALL HIS SKILL TO KEEP STATION BEHIND THAT HALF-INVISIBLE PLANE. EVEN THEN HE TENDED TO FLY WIDE.

BACK IN THE OPERATIONS ROOM AT COLTSWELL THE PILOTS HAD GATHERED TENSE AND SILENT, EAGER FOR THE FIRST INKLING OF NEWS ...

HELLO, NIGHTJAR ...
HELLO, NIGHTJAR ...



THERE WAS NOT A MAN OF THE SQUADRON WHO DIDN'T SUDDENLY THINK OF "GOOD OLD JIM" ... NOT A PAIR OF FINGERS THAT WASN'T LOYALLY CROSSED.

PASSING OUT OVER DOVER, THE HAVOC'S NAVIGATOR STIFFENED TO THE VOICE OF THE CONTROL OFFICER . . .

HELLO, NIGHTJAR . . .
HELLO, NIGHTJAR . . . VECTOR
NINETY . . . VECTOR
NINETY . . .

HAD THE RADAR FILTER ROOM
PICKED UP THE GERMAN AIRCRAFT ?

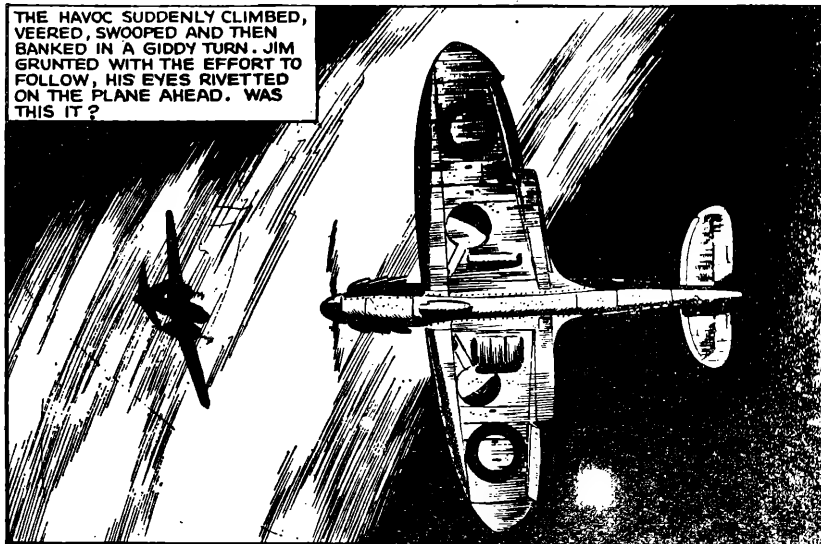
JIM, ON THE SAME FREQUENCY, GOT THIS TOO. HE WAS GRATEFUL FOR THE SPLIT SECOND WARNING BEFORE THE ELUSIVE HAVOC VEERED OFF INTO THE IMMENSE NIGHT.

THEN CAME THE THOUGHT OF THAT BLACK SHAPE AHEAD
PUTTING OUT ITS OWN GROPING INVISIBLE FEELERS .
JIM FELT TRICKLES OF PERSPIRATION .

THEN CAME MINUTES OF GRUELLING HIDE-AND-SEEK WHEN AT TIMES JIM'S HEART MISSED SEVERAL BEATS. THE HAVOC EVENTUALLY LED HIM OVER THE CONVOY...



THE HAVOC SUDDENLY CLIMBED, VEEED, SWOOPED AND THEN BANKED IN A GIDDY TURN. JIM GRUNTED WITH THE EFFORT TO FOLLOW, HIS EYES RIVETTED ON THE PLANE AHEAD. WAS THIS IT ?





JIM EASED THE SPITFIRE, THEN STARED ABOUT IN BLANK DISMAY. THE VAST NIGHT SKY WAS EMPTY!

WHERE'S THE HAVOC?

DESPERATELY JIM RANGED THE BAFFLING DARK. THEN JUST AS DESPAIR BEGAN CROWDING IN...

THERE SHE IS... OVER THE CONVOY AGAIN... BET SHE'S STILL TRAILING THAT JERRY PATHFINDER... I MUST GET DOWN THERE!



AS JIN DIVED HE SAW THE HAVOC MAKE A SUDDEN
TIGHT TURN . HIS HEART LEAPT . . .

SHE'S
ON IT!

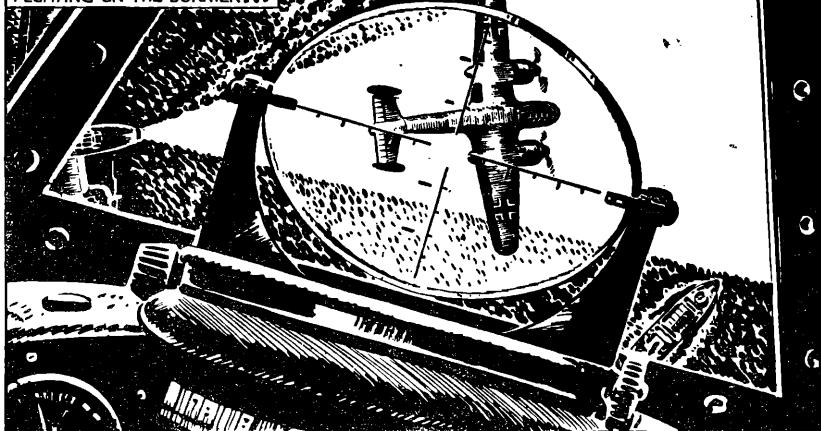


THEN . . .

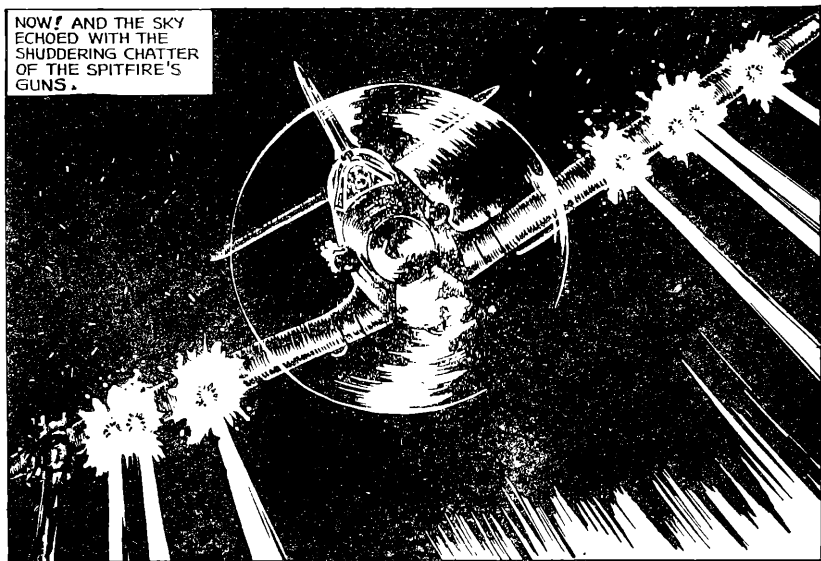
THE SEARCHLIGHT!
SHE'S GOT IT!

BUT COULD HE GET THERE IN TIME?

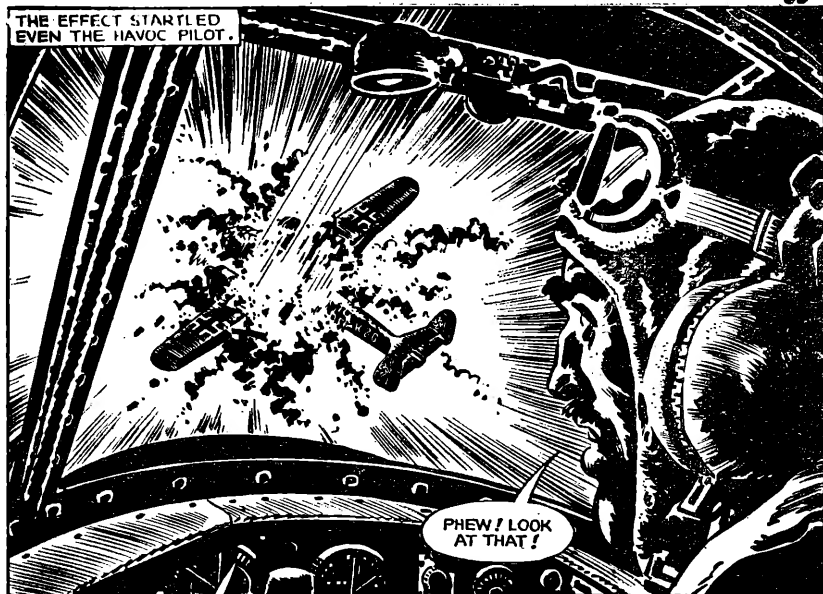
DOWN FELL THE SPITFIRE...
THE RANGE CLOSED... 600
...500... 450... FULL
THROTTLE... THUMB ON THE
GUN BUTTON... RING SIGHT
FLOATING ON THE DORNIER...



NOW! AND THE SKY
ECHOED WITH THE
SHUDDERING CHATTER
OF THE SPITFIRE'S
GUNS.



THE EFFECT STARTLED
EVEN THE HAVOC PILOT.



PHEW ! LOOK
AT THAT !

IN SECONDS IT WAS ALL OVER . JIM MENTALLY
CHALKED UP THE SQUADRON'S FIRST NIGHT
KILL AND FLEW ALONGSIDE THE HAVOC .



NOW WE CAN TALK !
NICE WORK , LITTLE
BROTHER !

YOU FOUND HIM ,
I ONLY KNOCKED
HIM DOWN .

THEY WINGED HOME , HAPPY IN THE
KNOWLEDGE THAT CONVOY X20 HAD
BEEN SPARED A NIGHT OF TERROR
AND DESTRUCTION .

THEIR LANDING AT COLTSWELL WAS SOMETHING THAT JIM SHEPPARD WOULD REMEMBER . . .



THE NEXT MORNING, JIM FOUND THAT HIS STOCK WITH THE SQUADRON HAD SOARED. GIVING THEM THE BENEFIT OF HIS UNIQUE EXPERIENCE, HE SAW IN THEIR FACES NOT ONLY AFFECTION BUT SOMETHING ELSE . . . SOMETHING HE HAD YEARNED FOR . . . AN UNSTINTING RESPECT!

WELL, THOSE ARE ALL THE TIPS I CAN GIVE YOU SO FAR. TONIGHT WE'LL ALL HAVE A PRACTICE BASH WITH THE HAVOC . . . AND I MEAN *EVERYBODY!*



AND SO, OUT OF HIS TESTING TRIAL OF THE NIGHT BEFORE JIM SHEPPARD AT LAST FOUND THE AUTHORITY HE SO SORELY NEEDED . . . TO LEAD HIS MEN TO EVEN GREATER TRIUMPHS IN DEFENCE OF BRITAIN'S SKIES.

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